

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0927

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THE FOLLOWING TELEGRAM WAS SENT ACTION NEW DELHI INFO BOMBAY
AND MADRAS 13 APRIL 1978 AND IS REPEATED FOR YOUR INFORMATION.

QUOTE:

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE CALCUTTA 0628

E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: PINT
SUBJECT: CONGRESS (I) MARCH ENDS IN VIOLENCE

1. A CONGRESS (I) MARCH ON WRITERS BUILDING THE
AFTERNOON OF APRIL 12 TO PROTEST AMONG OTHER ITEMS THE
LEFT FRONT GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO SOLVE THE POWER ILLS OF
THE STATE, THEIR HANDLING OF THE DANDAKARANYA REFUGEE ISSUE,
AND WHAT THE MARCHERS CONSIDER TO BE THE DETERIORATION OF
LAW AND ORDER, TURNED INTO A VIOLENT CONFRONTATION WITH
POLICE WITH THE PROSPECT FOR MORE UNREST TODAY.

2. THE MARCHERS WHO WERE MAINLY YOUNG, MIDDLE-CLASS
BENGALIS, LEFT THE RAJ BHAVAN AREA PEACEFULLY EN ROUTE
TO THE WRITERS' BUILDING, ABOUT 400 METERS AWAY. AS IS
USUAL IN THIS TYPE OF DEMONSTRATION, THE POLICE HAD
SET UP A CORDON ONE BLOCK SOUTH OF WRITERS' BUILDING
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BUT HAD APPARENTLY UNDERESTIMATED BOTH THE SIZE AND INTENT
OF THE MARCHERS WHO EASILY BROKE THROUGH POLICE
LINES AND RACED TO THEIR DISTINATION, WHERE THEY
BEGAN PELTING THE FIRST FLOOR OF THE BUILDING WITH
ROCKS AND BOTTLES. THE POLICE HURRIED IN REINFORCEMENTS
BUT DID NOT REACT TO THE VIOLENCE UNTIL THE CHIEF
MINISTER HIMSELF CAME FROM HIS OFFICE IN THE BUILDING

AND, ACCORDING TO ONE SOURCE, ORDERED THE POLICE TO QUOTE THRAS THEM OUT UNQUOTE. THE ENSUING LATHI-CHARGE AND TEAR GAS ASSAULT SERVED TO DISPERSE THE CROWD (ESTIMATED AT OVER 500 IN THE BENGALI-LANGUAGE PRESS). ABOUT 200 PEOPLE WERE ARRESED AND LATER RELEASED AND, ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, TWENTY-SIX PEOPLE INCLUDING SIX POLICEMEN, WERE INJURED. CHARGES OF POLICE BRUTALITY BY THE CONGRESS (I) MARCHERS, WHO WERE LED BY A.B.A. GANI KHAN CHAUDHURY, THE PRADESH CONGRESS COMMITTEE PRESIDENT, WERE FOLLOWED BY CPM CHIEF PROMODE DAS GUPTA'S ALLEGATION THAT INITIAL POLICE INACTION TO THE MARCHERS' VIOLENCE WAS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF HOW THE BUREAURACY WAS SABOTAGING THE LEFT FRONT'S EFFORTS TO GOVERN THE STATE.

3. TODAY THE CONGRESS (I) YOUTH FRONT IS ORGANIZING AN ALL BENGAL BLACK DAY WHICH INCLUDES A MASS 24-HOUR FAST AT CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY, TO PROTEST THE POLICE VIOLENCE, WHILE THE LEFT FRONT PLANS TO CONGREGATE AT THE ESPLANDE TO PROTEST CONGRESS (I)'S ACTIONS. THE POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE SHOULD BE MITIGATED BY POLICE PREPAREDNESS TODAY.

4. COMMENT: IT SHOULD BE KEPT IN MIND, IN ANSWER TO PROMODE DAS GUPTA'S ALLEGATION, THAT THE LEFT FRONT HAS GIVEN THE POLICE STANDING ORDERS NOT TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RESORT TO VIOLENCE WHEN DEALING WITH DEMONSTRATORS. THAT, COUPLED WITH POLICE UNPREPAREDNESS FOR WHAT APPEARED TO BE AN ITCH TO FIGHT ON THE PART OF THE MARCHERS, PROBABLY WAS THE MAIN CAUSE FOR WHAT HAS TURNED OUT TO BE THE WORST INCIDENT OF ITS KIND IN THE TEN MONTH RULE OF WEST BENGAL BY THE LEFT FRONT. MCCULLOCH

UNQUOTE
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